

By Lalit K. Jha

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/Panel-slams-US-for-putting-India-under-watch-list/H1-Article1-443447.aspx>

Group of American Hindus in Washington has slammed a US panel on global religious freedom for placing India on its 'watch list' for religious intolerance, saying that it shows the body's 'innate bias, lack of insight'.

Putting a question mark on the credibility of **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)**, the **Hindu American Foundation (HAF)** in a statement said, a closer look at the India designation shows the Commission's absence of understanding and loss of credibility.

Reacting to the HAF statement, **USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo**, said, 'If people want a detached and balanced assessment of the facts, they should read the report for themselves and draw their own conclusions.'

HAF charged **USCIRF** of indulging in personal vendetta as its members were denied visa by India early this year.

'Hindu Americans are wondering today if there is quid pro quo at work. The USCIRF was denied a visa this month to travel to India for a 'fact-finding' trip,' HAF said.

'But the Commission was clear that it would not visit Kashmir (because of threats by Muslim terrorists) nor the Northeast of India where militant Christian terrorists are displacing Hindus and fighting for separatism. It would not look into Hindu temple desecrations in Goa and other attacks,' HAF charged.

"It only wanted to visit Gujarat and Orissa. The Government of India said, "thanks, but no thanks." The USCIRF was outraged at the denial, and we can only ponder whether this was payback," HAF said.

Questioning its composition, HAF said, "Examine the makeup of the **USCIRF**, six members are Christian, one is Jewish and one Muslim. Not a single non-Abrahamic faith is represented. The chair is Vice President of the far-right Federalist Society, and another commissioner is an executive at the evangelical Southern Baptist Convention, which publishes material which calls Hinduism's grand festival of Diwali "devil worship."

"Putting India on the watch list will be perceived as a self-defeating and egregious act that needlessly complicates relations between two diverse, pluralistic and secular democracies," it said.

HAF charged that in its 11 pages, USCIRF details two specific episodes to justify slamming India, riots between Hindus and Muslims in the state of Gujarat that broke out in 2002 and between Hindus and Christians that left 40 dead in the state of Orissa in 2008 after a Hindu priest was murdered.

"These episodes in a country of a billion condemn an entire nation. Incredibly, the Commission's India chapter paints a portrait of minority religions on the run in India, pursued by a rabid Hindu majority!" HAF said.